

RELEASE IN FULL

CONFIDENTIAL

May 5, 2011

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: OBL photos

Yes, there is a Third Way—on the Bin Laden photos. Show them to members of Congress in a special secure room, something like when members were permitted to view Abu Ghraib pictures. Here are the reasons: Having the members file through will provide testimony to the President's feat. They will be not only be acknowledging but also enhancing his power. They will in effect become liegemen bowing before him, but not in any way they will resent or will protest. They will serve as witnesses to the magnitude of what he has done. Each of them will emerge speaking to the national and local press on what they have seen. Their words will be descriptive, but they will not be equivalent to graphic images that could be circulated themselves and have mischievous consequences. Having the whole Congress see the photos would have these likely impacts as well: The far right wing Tea Party Republicans would by their mere presence admit to the President's status above them and to his effectiveness. There would also be a salutary effect at the beginning of the negotiations on the debt ceiling. It would curb the ability of the Republicans to appeal to partisan sentiment and indulge in partisan rhetoric, giving the administration more edge. Having members of Congress testify to the reality of the photos will suppress any potential "Deather" movement, that the administration has either fabricated the event or suppressed some aspect of it. (See below for article on the emergence of the "Deather" movement.) This event should be staged over two or three days, occupying most of a work week, and continuing to dominate the public and congressional mind. Don't let the photos serve as trophies; instead take the Congress as trophy using the photos.

Perhaps the NSC communications operation could have done more turning an absolute triumph into a PR fiasco. But I don't quite know how. Kudos to Denis McDonough

URL: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2011-05-05/osama-bin-laden-killing-launches-birthers-new-deather-conspiracy-theory-/p/>

The Rise of Osama Death Conspiracies

by Josh Dzieza
 May 5, 2011 | 12:16am

Birthers who claimed President Obama was not born in the U.S. have moved on to another wild conspiracy theory: that Osama bin Laden was not really killed last Sunday—or was killed to shut him up, and then quickly buried at sea. Josh Dzieza explains.

Osama bin Laden's death couldn't have come at a better time for the birthers, those who believe that President Obama was born in Kenya, or Indonesia, or renounced his citizenship, or for various other reasons is ineligible for office. Obama had just held an exasperated press conference in which he released his long-form birth certificate, and chided the nation to get back to more serious work.

Launching the operation to kill the al Qaeda leader could be taken as an example of just the sort of serious duties lawmakers ought to be busy dealing with. Or, with its hasty ocean burial and lack of photographic evidence, it could be seen as just a bit too convenient.

That latter is how birther activist, lawyer, and dentist Orly Taitz took the news. “Perfect timing!” Taitz exclaimed on her site. “Our court hearing is scheduled to start in just a few hours. Major networks are supposed to be there with cameras rolling. Suddenly, Obama announces that the body of Osama Bin Ladin [sic] is found and we need to prepare for a possible terrorist act.” She cited a rumor that bin Laden had been killed years ago and his corpse kept on ice, ready to be rolled out when a diversion was needed. The theory has been around for years, but promptly popped up again on May 1, when Alex Jones posted it on his site, InfoWars, also noting that it “follows the release of a highly suspicious birth certificate.” Soon, people like Taitz and Jones had a name: the deathers.

Andy Martin, who is as close as a movement like the birthers comes to having a founder, says conspiracy peddlers like Taitz and Jones are ridiculous. He wants to redirect them to his new movement, which he prefers be called the doubters.

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“Ironically, Obama has created a new birther movement,” says Martin. “He's fanning the fires by giving just enough evidence to cast reasonable doubt.” Casting doubt is how Martin describes his role in the birther movement. He says he never claimed Obama was born in Kenya or Indonesia, just that he wanted to see the birth certificate (though he admits he started the Obama-is-a-Muslim meme). “You don't have to fantasize, just say, ‘Why not show the original? If there's an original document, why not show it?’” People like Taitz might use his research to pursue their own fantasies, says Martin, but he's always stuck to the facts. “I'm the Joe Friday of the Republican Party,” he says. “Obama loved birthers who lied, like Orly Taitz, because you could just laugh at them—but he hated me, because I just kept asking.”

Martin says he's been convinced Obama's birth certificate is “probably a valid document,” though he still has some questions. Now he's turning his attention to bin Laden's death. On May 3, after flying back from Iowa, where he was campaigning for president, he filed an FOIA

request for the “Bin Laden capture/kill archive” in order to “immediately counteract any conspiracy theories.” In the request, he warns: “We have learned from the original and continuing firestorm over the missing Obama birth certificate that secrecy leads to public skepticism. Skepticism inevitably leads to corrosion of confidence in government. You ought not to let that same process replicate itself in the case of the termination of bin Laden.”

It's that claim—to be out only for the truth—that Martin says makes the doubter movement more powerful than ones that paint fantastic alternative histories. “The reason the birther movement could never be stopped is because I launched it with truth and not lies—I knew there had to be a birth certificate, so why not show it?—it's the same reason the doubter movement won't be stopped.” Of course, Obama's birth certificate was shown, though people can always doubt its authenticity. Highly classified documents pertaining to the killing of bin Laden never will be, meaning Martin can question forever. It remains to be seen whether the public will feel as entitled to see such documents as they did the birth certificate.

In keeping with his strategy, Martin declines to say what exactly he expects to find other than “the truth,” saying only that what evidence we have raises questions. Why was bin Laden buried at sea? Who gave what orders? Why was he killed and not captured? In the first, he sees an offensive deference to Muslim tradition; in the second, he sees potential evidence of Obama's dithering. But it's the third he really presses. Bin Laden was worth more alive than dead, says Martin: We could have made propaganda of his trial, he says; we could have “paraded him down Pennsylvania Avenue in chains like the Romans.”

Instead, Navy SEALs shot him, saying he was resisting—a story Martin points out keeps changing—and a story he finds patently ridiculous, anyway. “An old man with kidney problems? A 10-year-old with karate could have taken him.” Instead, Obama ordered him killed, Martin says. Sometimes, Martin implies political motives: Obama didn't want a messy trial, Martin says—“he wanted the bonus without the onus.” Other times, Martin implies motives that are vaguely sinister: “You have to ask who he's covering for, if they had interrogated him, what he would have dropped in addition to those hard drives.”

But Martin says he is only asking questions, distancing himself from outright conspiracy theories—even as he fans them. It's a fine line that some elected officials walked during the heyday of the birthers—remaining pointedly agnostic, saying they didn't believe the theories, but why not release the certificate just the same. Recently Sen. Lindsey Graham seemed to echo John Boehner's comment that he would “take [Obama] at his word” about being a U.S. citizen, when the South Carolina lawmaker said he wants the president to release photos of bin Laden's body to “prove it beyond a reasonable doubt”—though he said he himself was not a doubter.

No polls have been done to see how many people believe bin Laden was killed, or was already dead, or that there's something amiss in his killing, but theories have been making the rounds on fringe conservative blogs, and Yahoo has reported a spike in searches for “bin Laden not dead” and “bin Laden still alive.” Martin says he's been inundated with emails from his birther-days contacts, proposing all sorts of theories, from people he says will eagerly follow him on his new mission.

Martin points out that anyone who directly questions bin Laden's death will have an unwelcome audience right now. "In the euphoria of Osama's death we're overlooking these things in the same way in the euphoria of Obama's inauguration we overlooked the facts around his birth," he says.

He gives it a week, saying nobody asks questions at the funeral—they ask them when the will is read. "I'm building a case now, like with the birthers, and all it will take is for a celebrity like Trump to put a match to it, and—boom!"

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